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DEPT FOR AF A A/S CARTER, AF/SPG, AF/C  
NSC FOR MGAVIN AND CHUDSON  
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DEPT PLS PASS USAID FOR AFR/SUDAN

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SUBJECT: SLA/UNITY TO NEGOTIATE WITH GOS IN DOHA

REF: A) KHARTOUM 344  
B) KHARTOUM 339

¶1. (SBU) Summary: SLA/Unity and four smaller Darfur rebel factions have agreed to attend negotiations with the GOS in Doha, signing a deal in Tripoli on March 15 with Qatari FM Ali Mahmoud looking on. Talks in Doha with the "Unity Plus" group should begin in two weeks, as Joint Mediator Djibril Bassole will continue the strategy of bringing rebel factions separately to talks with the government. Bassole also intends to draft a plan for involving Darfuri civil society soon. SLM/MM greeted the news with cautious optimism. In Darfur, IDPs continued to worry that sanitary conditions in the camps have deteriorated. CDA Fernandez visited Zam Zam IDP camp in North Darfur on March 16 (septel). Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Darfur rebel factions met in Libya on March 15 to sign an agreement to participate in the Doha peace process, including splinter groups from the once-formidable Sudanese Liberation Army (SLA) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM). SLA/Unity, SLA/Khamis Abdullah, the two factions comprising the United Resistance Force (URF), SLA/JUBA, and JEM/Idris Azraq agreed to participate in talks with the GOS in Doha at the end of March. (Note: Of the "Unity Plus" signatories, SLA/Unity has the most significant military presence in Darfur, but sources indicate it has been weakened by internal struggles. SLA/Adam Bakhit and JEM/Collective Leadership together compose URF, and do not have any military strength in Darfur. SLA/Juba is based in Juba and has no presence in Darfur. SLA/Khamis Abdullah has less than four vehicles and Khamis Abdullah himself has resided in Nairobi for the last six months. End note.)

¶3. (SBU) Joint Chief Mediator Djibril Bassole did not attend the "Unity Plus" meetings in Libya, but Qatari Foreign Minister Ali Mahmoud was there. According to George Zacariah, political assistant with the Joint Mediation Strategic Team (JMST), Bassole encouraged Libya to play a positive role by bringing SLA/Unity and the various small factions to Doha (Libya reportedly provides support to SLA/U, so Tripoli's encouragement is essential) and Bassole will continue the strategy of rounding up as many movements as possible to participate in the Doha talks. The JMST is still drafting its strategy for incorporating Darfuri civil society representatives into the talks. While acknowledging that, given the fractured state of Darfuri civil society, this will be a significant undertaking, Zacariah was optimistic that the JMST would manage to prepare a strategy soon. Bassole will be in Khartoum this week, and will then travel to New York to brief the UN Security Council next week. Following his trip to the UNSC, Bassole will move on to Doha to prepare for talks with the "Unity Plus" group that signed on March 15.

¶4. (SBU) Darfur Peace Agreement signatory movement SLA/Minni Minnawi reacted positively to the news. SLM/MM senior advisor and GNU parliamentarian Ali Traio said: "My initial reaction was good, but

we need to know what their common position will be." According to Traio, SLM/MM will continue to reject the GOS's policy of "overstepping" them as a movement. Prior to agreeing to travel to Doha, Minnawi will continue to push for special status for the movement within the Doha talks. "We want something genuine. We don't want to play around," Traio said.

15. (SBU) Ahmed Atim Uthman, community leader in Al Salaam IDP camp, told emboff on March 16 that sanitation in the camp had deteriorated markedly following the expulsion of Oxfam, the international NGO that oversaw water and sanitation projects for the entire camp. IDPs in the North Darfur camp within sight of El Fasher continue to be concerned about a coming shortage of water, estimating that in one week there may not be sufficient water in the boreholes that currently provide for the entire camp's water needs. At least one Darfuri offered assistance: the director of a hospital in El Fasher donated a drum of fuel to the IDPs in Al Salaam to operate the pumps that bring water to the surface, but IDPs continue to refuse GOS assistance. CDA Fernandez traveled to Zam Zam IDP camp in North Darfur on March 16 to observe firsthand the conditions there (septel).

16. (SBU) Comment: Even Bassole's office admits that the GOS is set on its decision to expel the 13 NGOs operating in Darfur, and at this moment humanitarian needs in Darfur remain our most pressing concern. SLA/Unity's agreement to attend negotiations in Doha is a positive but modest step forward in the peace process. If Bassole and the Qatars are able to negotiate a ceasefire between the GOS and SLA/U (and the other minor players,) this could lay the groundwork for a similar agreement between the GOS and JEM, and between the GOS and the last major rebel hold-out, SLA Abdel Wahid al Nur. Both JEM and SLA/AW are likely to be the last to sign an

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actual ceasefire agreement, if for nothing else to demonstrate that they are the two most powerful rebel groups in Darfur. If Bassole is able to negotiate individual ceasefire agreements this year between the major rebel groups and the GOS, this could lead to comprehensive peace talks, which should include civil society and tribal representatives (and possibly political parties, but the GOS will resist this.) If such talks occur, Bassole must negotiate a way for the only significant Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) signatory, Minni Minawi, to participate as an entity independent of the government, in recognition that the DPA was not implemented, and that a new agreement will supersede it. If Bassole is able to secure an agreement - then the hard part will start - how to make sure that a regime skilled in subverting almost all agreements keeps this one. As a Darfuri proverb says, how can you expect the snake that bit you to also cure you? End comment.

FERNANDEZ